

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE
MAYOR AND COUNTY JUDGE
OF THE
SAN ANTONIO/BEXAR COUNTY
TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE
JANUARY, 2009**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
I Introduction	page 2
II Mission (What is Our Destination?)	page 2
III Process (The Journey So Far)	page 6
IV Findings (Where Are We?)	page 9
V Recommendations	page 12
VI What's Next (The Roadmap)	page 15

FIGURES

Figure 1: Current Texas COG, DOT and MPO District Boundaries, page 4

Figure 2: Local Transportation Entities, page 5

Figure 3: VIA Funding Comparison, page 8

I. INTRODUCTION

In July, 2008, San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger and Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff appointed a 12-member task force to review the County's and City's transportation challenges and opportunities, with the assumption that a more efficient, integrated transportation system will better support growth and economic development. As described by Mayor Hardberger, the ultimate goal is "to unite our community around transportation choices that meet (our) economic and environmental needs."

Acknowledging the lack of state and federal resources, the group was asked to look at how best to leverage local funding. Realizing that stricter air quality standards are looming, the Mayor and Judge encouraged the task force to examine how land use planning and mass transit could impact development patterns and reduce vehicle-related pollution. Finally, the group was asked to make recommendations regarding increased use of public transportation. The task force was to return their recommendations in timely manner in order to meet state and federal legislative timelines.

II. MISSION

The task force was given the following mission: "San Antonio and Bexar County need a more efficient, integrated transportation system that supports our growth and economic development by providing public transit options, improving air quality, and leveraging local resources...(the task force will) review existing transportation plans and priorities, modes of travel, financing options, and regulatory and legislative contexts, comparing our community's system to that of our peer regions in Texas and across the country."

The task force was not asked to recommend specific road improvements, freight rail routes, or bus lines. Nor was the group asked to prioritize projects for funding from current sources, as the MPO already does. Rather, the group was asked to come up with a positive vision for our transportation future as a basis for system-level change. Such a charge was necessary because San Antonio and Bexar County's transportation planning and financing system is undergoing dramatic changes.

Locally, rapid growth continues to re-shape and expand our community. Across the state, funds are scarce and controversial policy decisions such as the promotion of toll lanes and the reliance on private sector financing mean that what money is available comes with significant strings attached. Nationally, the economy -- and energy prices--

continue to be unstable and have encouraged the skeptical public to give public transportation another look. At a global level, environmental concerns are leading to a “carbon-constrained” world in which high-polluting areas may find themselves at a distinct competitive disadvantage. And, finally, the newly elected president and a new congress will likely shift priorities and dollars away from projects prioritized by the previous administration and congress into new programs.

San Antonio's per capita GDP is 23% below the average for all MSAs. The relatively higher burden of transportation costs means that efficiency and effective use of existing resources is even more important.¹

Already, local jurisdictions have been advised that they must be prepared to implement projects more quickly than in the past in order to take advantage of federal dollars.

“I have asked my economic team to develop an economic recovery plan for both Wall Street and Main Street that will help save or create at least two and a half million jobs, while rebuilding our infrastructure...reducing our dependence on oil, and saving billions of dollars...we will create millions of jobs by making the single largest new investment in our national infrastructure since the creation of the federal highway system in the 1950s. We'll invest your precious tax dollars in new and smarter ways, and we'll set a simple rule – use it or lose it. If a state doesn't act quickly to invest in roads and bridges in their communities, they'll lose the money.²”

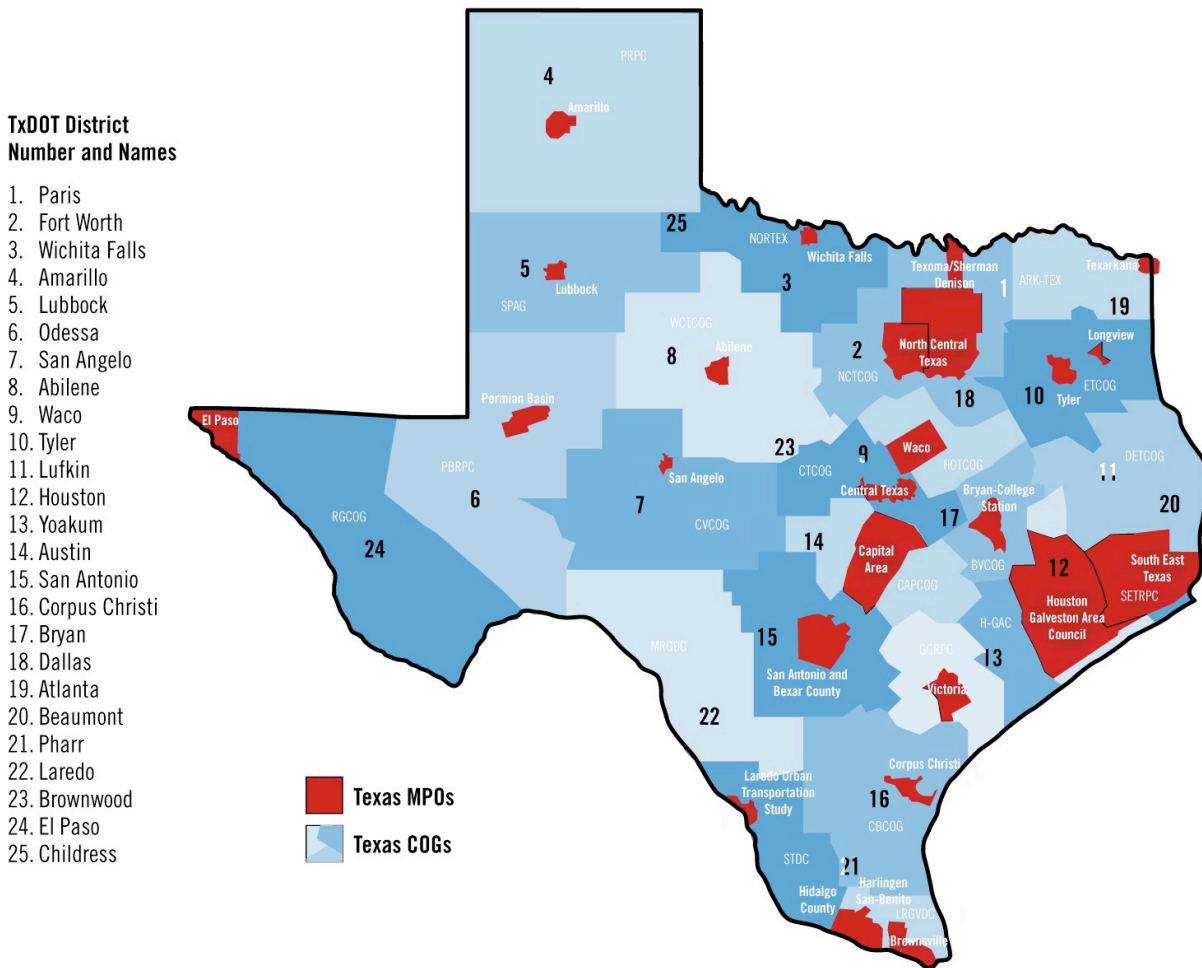
Because transportation projects may take years to plan, engineer and approve, federal funding directed toward projects that are “shovel-ready” in 2009 would primarily go to projects such as road resurfacing and added lane capacity. Most jurisdictions have not had time to readjust their transportation priorities in light of the global economic situation and oil price fluctuations of 2008. And yet it is in areas that have relied almost exclusively on roads, such as San Antonio, where strategic transportation investments could produce the biggest returns in efficiency, energy savings and air quality improvements.

While communities including San Antonio have already submitted projects for the recovery package, it is certainly not “too late” to shift our priorities in a more progressive, sustainable direction. The recently-released Obama -Biden transition team transportation strategies include a focus on core infrastructure; creating a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank; supporting high-speed freight and passenger rail; investing in public transit; and integrating smart growth into metropolitan planning. In addition, the Transportation Efficiency act reauthorization process will begin this year. Sharing the task force's vision and direction with our congressional delegation can help position us with regard to these federal strategies.

This initial report summarizes the process to date and contains the task force's findings, or where we are now, and the vision of where we want to be. Immediate term

recommendations are also proposed (two relating to legislative actions, as both the state and federal legislative sessions convene in January, 2009). Additional recommendations relate to the task force itself, which will continue to meet and will issue another report in 2009.

Current Texas MPO, COG, and DOT District Boundaries



Provided by the Texas Department of Transportation

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION ENTITIES

The **Advanced Transportation District (ATD)** was created in 2004 by voters in the city of San Antonio and unincorporated Bexar County, who authorized a quarter-cent sales tax increase. Revenue is split evenly between the public transit system and road improvements.

The **Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG)** provides services in a 12-county region, including serving as the transportation district for the 11-county rural area. Governed by a board of local elected officials, it is a voluntary association of cities, counties, and special governmental districts. Organized as a regional planning commission in 1968 under Chapter 391, Local Government Code, AACOG is a political subdivision of the state and can plan, assist local governments, and deliver public services, but not tax or regulate. State law requires that the governmental body of AACOG be composed primarily of local government officials.

A **Regional Mobility Authority** is a local transportation authority that can build, operate, finance, and maintain transportation projects, both toll and non tolled. Authorized by the Texas Legislature in 2001, an RMA is overseen by a seven-member Board of Directors, with the Chair appointed by the Governor, and the other six members appointed by the County Commissioners Court. The Alamo RMA is unique in that one member of the Board also serves as the representative for the City of San Antonio.

The creation of the **Austin-San Antonio Intermunicipal Commuter Rail District** was authorized by the Legislature in 1997. The cities of Austin and San Antonio and the counties of Travis and Bexar created the District in 2002. The Rail District's Board is comprised of locally elected officials, business representatives, urban and rural transit providers, and members of the general public appointed by the Texas Transportation Commission. The mission is to determine the feasibility and viability of a commuter rail line connecting Austin, San Antonio and the surrounding communities.

The **San Antonio - Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)** was created by federal law to conduct the planning process for federal and state funding for roadways, transit, rideshare, bikeways and sidewalks. The MPO's governing body, the Transportation Policy Board, consists of ten elected representatives and nine appointed officials representing the state, Bexar County, San Antonio, suburban communities, VIA Metropolitan Transit Authority, the Northeast Partnership and the Alamo Area Council of Governments. By law, MPO plans are fiscally constrained--they cannot include projects for which funds have not been identified.

San Antonio Mobility Coaliton (SAMCo) was created in 2001 as a public-private partnership to advocate for funding of the community's transportation needs. Founding members were Bexar County, the City of San Antonio, VIA, and the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), a state agency with 25 districts, has the mission to provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

VIA Metropolitan Transit (VIA) was created by a majority vote of the citizens in November 1977. That election also authorized the collection of a half-cent sales tax to fund the transit authority. VIA provides most Bexar County residents, including those of various municipalities within the county, with bus and paratransit services.

III. PROCESS

The County Judge and Mayor chose task force members to represent diverse interests involved in transportation planning, advocacy and provision of services:

William Thornton, Chair	Jack Leonhardt
Mary Briseno, Vice Chair	James Lifshutz
Wayne Alexander	Terrell McCombs
Bill Barker	Richard Perez
Linda Chavez-Thompson	Rick Pych
Derrick Howard	Jim Reed

Committee members are also members of such entities as VIA, the MPO, RMA, AACOG, and others. After an initial organizational meeting, all meetings of the task force were open to the public. Materials and information requested by members of the Task Force have been posted on the Transportation Task Force website (<http://www.bexar.org/transportation>) along with meeting agendas and other information.

The task force formed two committees, Planning for Transportation and Paying for Transportation. The committees met to hear additional presentations and to develop recommendations for consideration by the group as a whole. In response to the Judge's and Mayor's request that the task force craft a vision statement for the area's transportation future, a committee of the whole adopted the following:

Cities develop over many years. A community vision guides growth by answering the question, "What do we want our future to look like?" The members of the Transportation Task Force support the following vision of our transportation system and our community's future--

Our transportation system should be sustainable and support the quality of life of residents, the health of the environment, and the economic growth of the community. Our transportation system should provide choices in the movement of people and goods and in urban development patterns. Roads, public transit, rail, bicycling and walking should provide safe, efficient, convenient and affordable access whether or not one owns a car. The design of our transportation system at all

scales should be a source of community pride and healthy living.

The vision statement is based on these values and principles--

Our community includes not just the residents of San Antonio and Bexar County but those from surrounding counties who work, shop, and enjoy the amenities of our metropolitan area;

The scope of our thinking must be regional;

Residents and visitors to our community deserve the same opportunities offered by other communities across the nation;

We must position ourselves to compete with other cities and regions that are increasingly less dependent on oil and other energy resources; and

New growth, and redevelopment of older areas, should be planned around transit whenever possible in order to use taxpayer's dollars cost-effectively.

The vision, values and principles served as the foundation for the research and discussions carried out in committee and by the task force. Throughout a four-month process, the task force members surveyed the current state of transportation planning and infrastructure in our region and in peer communities. The group heard from local agencies, transportation engineers, national experts, and community leaders. Some clear and obvious short-term recommendations emerged, such as seeking additional flexibility for local transportation funding from the state legislature. While public transportation should be the top priority because of its relative underfunding in the past, the task force also agreed that the overwhelming majority of Bexar County citizens will continue to rely on automobiles. Roads, and particularly road safety, are also important.

The complexity of these issues lead task force members to conclude that more research was needed before issuing recommendations in key areas. For example, recommendations regarding changing development patterns-while common sense in nature--will mean changes to a number of plans and ordinances, including the Unified

Development Code (UDC). As a result, the task force decided to issue this initial report in time to meet legislative schedules and to continue their work in 2009. Sections IV, V and VI of this initial report thus contain Findings (where we are), Recommendations (what to do now), and What's Next (a roadmap to future actions). The task force's "next steps" are presented as the final recommendation in Section IV.

Transportation challenges are closely related to other issues--for example, parents may want a shorter, cheaper drive to work but be unwilling to sacrifice newer schools in a more suburban district--that are beyond the scope of the task force process. Task force members recognize that even if the community unites around a new vision, these impediments will remain. However, it is also clear that San Antonio and Bexar County are not competitive with our peer regions in Texas and across the country when it comes to transportation solutions. This deficit and others which the task found seem to stem from the lack of a clear, consistent, and consensus-based "roadmap" regarding our community's development. If we don't know where we're going, or don't agree on our destination, we certainly can't decide how to get there.

- *Among the nation's ten largest cities, only San Antonio lacks some form of public rail transit.*
- *Of the five largest metro areas in Texas, four (Houston, Dallas, Ft. Worth, and Austin) are engaged in a community-based visioning and planning process. Only San Antonio is not.*
- *Around the country, 24 of the 30 largest metro areas have a fixed-guideway transit system in operation or under construction. San Antonio does not.*

Texas Transit Agency Sales and Use Tax Receipts & Base Fares Fiscal Year 2008

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Receipts</u>	<u>% of VIA Total</u>	
Austin MTA	\$ 155,536,644.21	130.61%	
Dallas MTA	414,314,590.44	347.93%	
Houston MTA	522,507,340.54	438.78%	
San Antonio MTA & ATD (*)	119,081,325.39	100.00%	(Proposed to be effective 1/1/09)

(*) Includes VIA MTA and ATD-VIA share only (taxes allocated to CoSA and TxDOT are excluded).

Data provided by VIA Metropolitan Transit

IV. FINDINGS

Resources

1. Across all modes, transportation needs are greater than available funding.
2. Our transit operations are underfunded when compared to those in other Texas cities.
3. New federal and state funding will likely target communities with efficient transportation systems that include mass transit.
4. In the past, when our community has worked together to propose innovative transportation solutions, we have been successful, e.g. formation of the Advanced Transportation District and the Regional Mobility Authority.
5. Global conditions such as the instability of energy supplies and costs and the regulatory responses to air pollution and greenhouse gases will give communities with multiple options for transportation an economic advantage over those that rely on a single mode or fuel source.
6. In order to remain economically competitive with other regions in the cost and ease of doing business, we need to offer efficient public transit options.
7. San Antonio has long been known as Military City, USA; leadership in alternative transportation modes and fuel sources supports current military goals and provides opportunities for research synergy.

Planning

1. There is no comprehensive transportation plan for our community beyond the fiscally-constrained plan prepared by the MPO.
2. Local agencies, organizations, and governments do not have a shared vision for our transportation future.
3. At an operational level, the various transportation entities in this region do not adequately coordinate their policies, planning and projects.
4. New transportation entities are being created for specific purposes, without formal linkages to existing transportation entities.

5. Land use planning affects energy consumption, public health, economic development, and air and water quality.
6. There is a strong relationship between land use and transportation, and it is appropriate and necessary for our community to adopt policies that guide land use; however, transportation and land use planning are not integrated.
7. Existing land use plans are often ineffective because components of the plans are not implemented, are amended, or are waived.
8. Transportation and related issues affect multiple jurisdictions in our region, but we lack a sense of regional identity and have not defined our region.
9. It is unlikely that we can reach a consensus on land use and transportation policies unless we engage in an inclusive planning process with a strong education component.

Most of the above Findings reflect gaps in our planning and financing structures. However, and just as important, there are a number of recent examples of how our community can “get it right” by emphasizing transit and walkability, coordinating infrastructure development, or using creative funding mechanisms.

River North: The first plan in San Antonio to use a form-based code, the River North Plan was produced by a team of architects and planners lead by Moule & Polyzoides. River North is envisioned as a mixed-use redevelopment area linked by walkable streets and a trolley.

Medical Center: Coordinated investments by the City of San Antonio, TxDOT and the Medical Center Alliance have helped ease congestion, improve way-finding, modify intersections, and make the area more accessible by public transit.

City South: As the first large-scale new urbanist community planned for San Antonio, Verano utilizes the zoning and land development options offered through the City South DAMA. Anchored by a new Texas A&M campus, Verano will offer a walkable, transit-friendly mix of spaces for learning, living, working and shopping.

Advanced Transportation District: Voters approved a 1/4 cent sales tax in November, 2004, to create the Advanced Transportation District. The first local sales tax in the state dedicated to transportation, the ATD’s 1/4 cent is split

between roads and transit: one-half of the revenue goes to VIA, one-quarter serves as a TxDOT project match, and one-quarter is dedicated to local streets.

City/County Bond Projects: During the past five years, the City of San Antonio and Bexar County have greatly increased coordination in the planning and execution of capital projects. In 2003, voters approved the first joint City-County bond package. The County is implementing a \$500 million regional flood control projects program jointly developed with the City of San Antonio. San Antonio River Authority and Suburban cities.

Regional Mobility Authority: In 2003, Bexar County Commissioners Court created a Regional Mobility Authority, the second in the state. The Alamo RMA is a local transportation authority that can construct, operate, finance, and maintain transportation projects, both toll and non tolled. The Alamo RMA is unique in that one member of the Board also serves as the representative for the City of San Antonio

We have opportunities to build on these successes if we can shift our transportation focus from the planning and construction of projects--typically roads--to the creation of a multi-modal transportation system supported by changes to land-use planning policies. This change is necessary because even the complete implementation of existing transportation and land-use plans would not result in a community consistent with the Task Force Vision Statement. The MPO is currently developing the 2035 plan, offering a significant opportunity to advance this new vision and increase collaboration. Unlike past plans, it is critical that the 2035 plan start with our desired outcome, and then develop cost assumptions and payment strategies to support our vision.

More compact development, mixing of land uses, urban design and architecture that minimize the walk distance to transit, and strategically located regional facilities are all proven methods of reducing motorized travel demands.³

Notably, while the successes mentioned above involve multiple jurisdictions, they are confined to Bexar County. A truly regional approach would include multiple adjacent cities and counties, as well as the City of Austin and Travis County. Issues such as rail linkages between the San Antonio and Austin airports, and the connection of Texas' major urban areas through high-speed rail, cannot be decided by one region alone. The political complexities of defining our region and coordinating with other metro areas makes this a topic for further work, to be addressed in the second task force report.

What Is A Region?

*"(A)ll of the major regional constructs currently in use are based on multi-county alliances that were formed about 40 years ago...Texas has experienced increased urbanization, the emergence of a vibrant technology sector, a decline in the relative importance of oil and agriculture, and the rise of the "service economy,"...Transportation arteries were quite different; virtually every aspect of transportation, communications, utilities, and financial services was heavily regulated, and the global economy was not a major factor in domestic performance. The entire concept of regionalism was in its infancy, and the analytical approach to regional definition had not been significantly explored. These and myriad other phenomena suggest that a reexamination of regional linkages is a worthwhile endeavor."*⁴

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Even a brief summary of the task force's findings makes it clear that addressing our transportation deficits will take a great deal of work. In fact, it will require a transformational and cultural shift in our community values. While difficult, such a transformation is by no means impossible, as the accomplishments of SAWS clearly show. Our community uses roughly the same amount of water as it did twenty years ago, despite a 50% increase in population. Water conservation has become part of our culture. SAWS was able to develop and implement a water conservation campaign that changed the way we plant our lawns, brush our teeth, water our golf courses, and cool our buildings. SAWS was successful because their efforts were backed by a consensus among elected officials, the business community, and the public that an adequate water supply is essential to our community's economic future.

The task force believes that San Antonio and Bexar County cannot remain competitive with our peer regions unless we develop an integrated, efficient transportation system that offers multiple transportation options and is supported by changes in our land use and development patterns. The recommendations in this report are the first steps towards significant changes in our planning and infrastructure provision. Because of the complexity of the issues involved, such as changes to the City of San Antonio's Master Plan, the UDC, and other city ordinances, this preliminary report offers only Immediate-term recommendations, to be implemented within the next six months. The task force will issue another report later in 2009.

During the next six months, the Mayor and Judge should address the identified gaps by initiating the following actions:

1. Transportation Funding

Gap: Our transportation system is underfunded compared to peer regions

Actions:

1. Increase transportation funding through passage of state legislation that allows local residents to vote on proposed projects and funding sources, such as an increased vehicle registration fee, a mileage fee, driver's license fee increase, a vehicle registration impact fee, or an excise tax on fuels. Work in concert with the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex and other urban areas of the state to support a statewide bill that allows metropolitan areas to collect new revenues under a governance structure appropriate for that area. The proposed legislation should preserve existing TxDOT funding.
2. Aggressively pursue federal funding of efficient local and regional high capacity transit and other improvement projects.
3. Maximize the transportation funding available through the local sales tax.

2. Administration and Oversight

Gap: Multiple entities with overlapping authority do not coordinate planning or operations

Actions:

1. Consolidate the Regional Mobility Authority and VIA Metropolitan Transit in order to create a more functional Advanced Transportation District to administer the new local funds. This will require legislative changes to the current ATD. Each organization's contractual agreements should be preserved.
2. Integrate the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Alamo Area Council of Governments, especially with regard to planning processes. Retain separate boards. Emphasize the preparation of an unconstrained plan that reflects the community's highest aspirations.
3. Support partnerships, including the Austin San Antonio Corridor Council, and improve coordination with major metropolitan areas and surrounding counties along the I-35 corridor to address planning at an even larger scale.

3. Transportation Priorities

Gap: New government funds will likely be targeted to efficient transportation systems that include mass transit

Actions:

1. Request MPO to develop an unconstrained plan in tandem with the 2035 Plan.
2. Request VIA and then ATD to move forward with the planning, funding and development of an enhanced public transit system, to include light rail.
3. Communicate with our state and federal delegation about our transportation needs and priorities.

4. Transportation and Land Use

Gap: Transportation and land use planning not integrated

Action: Provide a basis for transit funding requests by taking land use and behavioral changes into account. Create an inclusive “workshopping” process around the MPO’s adoption of the five-county travel demand and modal split model for its five-year forecast; this process needs to occur before the adoption of the model in March, 2009.

5. Defining Our Region

Gap: Our region is ill-defined and lacks a sense of regional identity.

Action:

1. Take advantage of economic opportunities resulting from a growing San Antonio-Austin corridor. Expand participation in the Greater Austin San Antonio Corridor Council and engage in other activities that support coordinated state and federal infrastructure investment and provide access to larger industry clusters and markets.
2. Begin planning an outreach campaign to build a base of support for regional cooperation in urbanized or urbanizing areas. Key questions include which counties or municipalities are within our region, whether current state and federal regional designations meet our planning needs, and how corridors such as the I-35 travel shed interact with or overlay regions. See 6B below for additional issues relate to defining our region.

6. Task Force Next Steps: Comprehensive Transportation Vision and Plan

Gap: No comprehensive regional transportation plan or shared vision to guide development of a plan

Action: Continue and expand the work of the task force by creating two working groups, each with a focused purpose:

- A. Current Planning, to ensure well-coordinated efforts among existing public entities through efforts such as the MPO travel demand model workshop and a community plans inventory

- B. Community Engagement, to recommend an inclusive, community-based regional planning process with a strong education and advocacy component (such as Envision Central Texas or the Sacramento Regional Blueprint)

The expanded task force should continue to hold open meetings on a regular basis and should have at least one hearing to seek public response to this preliminary report.

VI. WHAT'S NEXT

The task force believes that better coordination and a regional planning process will position our community to solve our transportation challenges. Currently, needs exceed resources and yet many proposed solutions are quite controversial and might not attract enough public support to be politically viable. Without a plan and lacking “buy-in” from citizens about the nature of our problems and acceptable responses, elected and appointed leaders are without clear guidance. This challenge is at the heart of the task force's ongoing activities. During the coming months the task force will focus on developing a process to reach community consensus and developing new models for transportation service delivery and planning. Significant questions remain, such as how the MPO and COG will be integrated to achieve more visionary planning; how the newly-integrated planning (MPO/COG) and service delivery (ATD) agencies would relate to each other; and even which community planning process is the best fit for San Antonio, Bexar County and the region. Much work remains to be done.

The ultimate outcome of the task force's work should be a “Roadmap”-- a truly comprehensive (economically and environmentally sustainable) transportation plan, based on a well-integrated governance structure that makes optimal use of a variety of financing tools and includes an extensive civic engagement process. Most importantly, the plan should help us achieve the healthy, sustainable transportation system envisioned by the task force, one that “provide(s) choices in the movement of people and goods and in urban development patterns. Roads, public transit, rail, bicycling and walking should provide safe, efficient, convenient and affordable access whether or not one owns a car. The design of our transportation system at all scales should be a source of community pride and healthy living.”

ENDNOTES

1. Bureau of Economic Analysis
2. President-Elect Barack Obama, Weekly Address, December 6, 2008
3. Ewing and Cervero, *Travel in the Built Environment: A Synthesis*. 2002,
4. The Perryman Group, *Potential Regional Economic Boundaries in Texas*. December 2007.